

My mother and her
sister by jane rogers
essay sample



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'My mother and her sister' is a short-story written by Jane Rogers in 1996. Here we follow our main character in the period after his mother's death and funeral. In this period the main character has invited his aunt Lucy to come and stay with him. This visit gushes forth a lot of memories and reflections about his aunt Lucy and his mother as well – whom the main character has a hard time mourning.

The main character of the short-story 'My mother and her sister' is the I-person, who is telling the story. It is not obvious whether this person is male or female. When we first meet the main character he has invited his aunt Lucy to his home after the funeral of his own mother. He is a little unsecure about the reason that and asks himself; 'Why did I ask Lucy to stay?' (Line 31, page 2) Then he states; 'I owe her. Gratitude or something', but at the same time he adds; 'I thought we might talk: my mother, her sister – there must be something to say. I thought she'd know how to behave, that grief would rub off on me.' (Line 34, page 2) This shows us that the main reason he has brought her to his house is the fact that he has not found a way to grieve. That he wants somebody to show him how.

Lacking the ability to mourn his mother occupies a lot of his thoughts; 'I haven't cried at all, I don't know why. When I tell myself she is dead I can't think anything. I seem to be quite hollow, to have gasp in my head.' (Line 24, page 2) This way of thinking indicates that our main character currently is in some state of shock and the way he keeps reminding himself that she is dead probably indicates an amount of denial too. The main character is mainly preoccupied with describing his aunts Lucy as the first thing we are told is; 'My aunt Lucy was married for 49 years, until her husband died.

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They had five children.' (Line 1, page 2) The fact that he chooses to begin the story this way shows us that he reflects a lot about her, which sounds odd due to the fact that his mother has just passed away and therefore should occupy a greater amount of his thoughts. This probably arises due to the state of shock that he finds himself in, because it is a way of not having to deal with his mother's death being too focused on his aunt Lucy.

Furthermore the main character describes how he memorizes his Aunt Lucy as being as a picture in a children's book as ' a Beatrix Potter bunny mommy', and although the main character in his childhood enjoyed her hospitality in the school holidays, when his mother worked he explains that they were looking forward to another thing; ' and we waited for our mum to phone us' (Line 20, page 2)

This shows us that the main character loved his mother very much even though she wasn't a traditional mother. He also describes how she always had a new boyfriend and that he liked when she had a new one, because that would make her happy and lift the mood in their home. But at the same time he also tells that; ' when her boyfriend's came around we made ourselves scarce.' (Line 15, page 2) This statement tells us how much the main character actually loved his mother even though he at times came in second row for his mother's attention. As long as she was happy he was happy too.

Our main character is clearly proud of his mother and the virtues that she had taught them: ' We learned from our mother that nothing is more important than your freedom, and that familiarity breeds contempt.'(Line 13,

page 2) At the same time he declares: ' A mother like Aunt Lucy must be pathetic'. (Line 6, page 2) This shows us that our main character is a little patronizing towards his aunt Lucy.

It probably also sounds more degrading than he actually feels, because this aversion towards Lucy's character is probably rooted in his childhood memories of when his mother used to tease him and his brother by telling them that they would have been better off with a mother like Lucy. So in that sense Aunt Lucy did not represent something bad she just represented something they didn't want, which is another mother. This is also clear when the main character says; ' in fact she looks very like my mother, although I swear she never used to' (Line 44, page 3) This shows us that the main character up till this point couldn't think that his mother and Lucy could in any possible way resemble one another even in relation to appearance.

In the course of the short-story the main character gradually finds out more about her aunt Lucy. He thinks he knows her and tries to please her with the things he expects her to like. But it turns out that his assumptions regarding his aunt Lucy isn't the way he thinks they are; '[she] shot my last stupid assumption down in flames by choosing Indian rather than Italian.' (Line 75, page 3) This shows us that the main character's perception has changed and he realizes that the image he had of his aunt wasn't real. In the end his aunt Lucy describes his mother for him which makes him realize that the picture that he had of his mother isn't real as well; ' Your mother was like a child. She never learnt to stop hoping. She thought she could have happiness.'

(Line 148, page 5) When hearing this comment he realizes that his mother whom he loved so intensely wasn't the person he thought her to be.

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At this point the main character finally feels an urge to cry, which wasn't there before this moment. The tears have also been a symbol towards the whole short-story in which the main character distinguishes himself from the sorrow. Everything around our main character seems to be wet because of the rain, but not him; ' At night I lie awake and listen to the rain.... I am a dry island in my bed and I wonder what Lucy is thinking'.(Line 65, page3) When the rain finally stops the tears of our main character finally falls.

In the end of the short-story the main character has changed. His perception regarding his own mother and her sister has changed; ' I cry. For my mother, who wanted happiness. For her sister who knows it is impossible. For myself, for what I couldn't see, and for what I cannot understand.' (Line 153, page 5). This shows us that our main character has finally seen the similarities between his mother and her sister; they were both unhappy with their lives.

His mother all her life searched desperately for happiness among a multitude of different boyfriends. But she searched in vain. His aunt Lucy who spent 49 years with the same man had simply from the start given up on happiness. The main character cries for himself because he couldn't see what was going on right in front of him and cries because he cannot understand how happiness and life. The end shows us that the main character has finally comprehended that his ' mother and her sister' whom he has never thought to be similar have been the same all along.